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English only

Fifty-seventh session
Agenda item 52
Strengthening of the United Nations system

Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change

Responses to issues raised and supplementary information

1. This conference room paper is intended to provide responses to and supplementary information on the major issues raised by various individual Member States and groups of Member States on the report of the Secretary-General on "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1). The paper covers issues related to human rights, partnerships with civil society and human resources (actions 2-5, 19, 20, 25-29, 32 and 34), to be considered at the open-ended informal consultations of the General Assembly to be held on Tuesday, 12 November 2002.

Doing what matters

Action 2

2. At the request of Governments, the United Nations supports human rights capacity-building at the national level. What action 2 seeks to achieve is improved inter-agency cooperation geared to supporting the initiatives of Governments themselves.

3. The provision of technical cooperation to Governments, at their request, is the topic of regular discussions and resolutions in the Commission on Human Rights and other forums. Thus, earlier this year, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Commission on Human Rights on advisory services and technical cooperation in the field of human rights (E/CN.4/2002/116), in which the general policy was described as follows:

> "The Technical Cooperation Programme of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supports countries in promoting and protecting all human rights at the national and regional level by incorporating international human rights standards in national laws, policies and practices and by building sustainable national capacities to implement

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these standards and ensure respect for human rights. ... The Programme is carried out at the request of the concerned Government".

4. The ground rules for technical cooperation will remain. The core aim is to advance the implementation of treaties which Member States have ratified — in full cooperation with Member States and at their request.

5. At the request of Member States, particular attention will be paid to such key areas as providing information and jurisprudence on human rights norms to judges and lawyers; helping national human rights institutions in areas where Governments ask for support; providing support on issues of non-discrimination, equality, gender rights and race relations commissions; providing human rights information and training to law-enforcement, prison and military personnel; and helping to provide manuals and materials on human rights education and on civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, including the progressive realization of rights to food, education and health.

6. Different parts of the United Nations system already act to support, at the request of governments, national courts or other institutions, as well as projects dealing with economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights. There is no change in mandate envisaged for the resident coordinator.

Action 3

7. In seeking to support the human rights treaty bodies in their quest for improved methods of work, the treaty bodies will themselves be consulted first. This process is already actively under way.

8. After a process of consultation with the treaty bodies, approaches and methods that attract broad consensus will then be discussed with States parties to the treaties.

9. The role of the Secretariat will be to facilitate consultations. At the end of the day, decisions on working methods are for the treaty bodies themselves, and, in the final analysis, it is for the States parties to treaties to pronounce on any ideas for structural adjustments.

Action 4

10. The special procedures are created by, report to and are accountable to the Commission on Human Rights.

11. What action 4 strives for is a process of consultation with mandate holders intended to strengthen the system of special procedures and modernize their methods of work.

12. Consultations will take place with the mandate holders, and the Commission on Human Rights, as the parent body, will be kept abreast throughout the process.

Action 5

13. As for all reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Secretary-General will report to the General Assembly on the implementation of the OIOS recommendations for managerial improvements in OHCHR. The process of implementing the OIOS recommendations is well under way, and significant managerial improvements have already been made in OHCHR.

Serving Member States better

Action 19

14. The high-level panel on the relationship between the United Nations and civil society will be composed of eminent persons from all parts of the world, both developed and developing. The panel will be encouraged to consult broadly with Member States and representatives of civil society. Their findings will be transmitted to the Member States. Determining modalities for civil society participation is a responsibility of the Member States.

Action 20

15. The proposal for a Partnerships Office recognizes the increased interest from private sector firms and foundations in collaborating with the United Nations on a global level. The report of the Secretary-General on cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector (A/56/323 and Corr.1), provided a comprehensive analysis of existing levels of cooperation. The Partnerships Office will operate within the framework of guidance provided by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/76 of 11 December 2001. The comprehensive report requested in the resolution will be provided to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

The Organization and its people: investing in excellence

16. As part of the first round of Secretariat reform, a new strategy for human resources management was proposed in 2000, comprising 10 major building blocks (A/55/253 and Corr.1). This strategy was endorsed by Member States in its resolution 55/258 of 14 June 2001. A recent report of the Secretary-General (A/57/293) outlines the goals, achievements to date and future activities in each of the areas listed above. Considerable progress has been made, most notably in the establishment of core competencies, staff development activities and an enhanced system of performance management. One of the most significant changes — a new staff selection system that integrates recruitment, placement, managed mobility and promotion — came into effect on 1 May 2002.

17. The measures outlined in section VI of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387 and Corr.1) fit within the strategic framework outlined above and are intended to build on the work already done.

Action 25

18. Mobility, defined as movement within and between functions, departments, occupations, duty stations and organizations of the United Nations system, is now expected of all staff. It is therefore essential that the Organization's rules and practices not only enable staff to meet this expectation, but also actively encourage and reward the flexibility and mobility of staff. The Office of Human Resources Management will undertake a review of the contractual arrangements and benefits offered to Secretariat staff. Existing consultative mechanisms with the agencies, funds and programmes will be used to review those issues. Inter-agency agreements

will also be reviewed to ensure that staff can move between functions and organizations with ease. The review will be completed by the end of 2003.

19. Any budgetary implications arising from the reviews and related actions will be submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee in due course.

20. For qualified spouses, the Secretariat would seek an understanding with the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies that qualified spouses should be considered for vacant positions arising in the same duty station.

Actions 26 to 29

21. In order to reflect the fact that the contribution of both Professional and General Service staff is equally important to the work of Organization, all staff members shall be referred to as international civil servants as from 1 January 2003. This measure will neither affect established remuneration principles nor have budgetary implications.

22. None of the measures envisaged in actions 26 to 29 affect the Secretary-General's commitment to ensuring that the composition of the Secretariat remains geographically balanced. The Secretariat will continue its efforts to meet quotas for unrepresented and underrepresented countries through the national competitive examination and other targeted recruitment mechanisms.

23. Flexible working arrangements mean a redistribution of normal working hours. Such arrangements will be made available to staff in general, but individual arrangements will be subject to approval by the programme manager. That approval is always conditioned on a determination that flexibility is consistent with the needs of service and that there would be no adverse effect on the delivery of the programme. Flexible arrangements would be terminated or suspended if there were any adverse effect on programme delivery or on the quality of services offered. There is no link between the availability of flexible working arrangements and the contractual status of the staff members involved.

Action 32

24. The measures envisaged under this action would take into account guidance given by the General Assembly in connection with recent reports of the Secretary-General. In his report on accountability and responsibility (A/55/270), the Secretary-General delineated the continuum between responsibility, authority and accountability, and presented the elements of an integrated and effective system of accountability. Following its consideration of this report, the General Assembly, in its resolution 55/258, requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve accountability and responsibility in the reform of human resources management as well as the monitoring and control mechanisms and procedures and to report thereon at the fifty-seventh session. As set out in the report on the implementation of human resources management reform (A/57/293), every effort is made by the Secretariat to ensure that delegation of authority is accompanied, among other things, by clearly defined lines of authority and accountability, as well as appropriate training and support. The report of the Secretary-General on the monitoring capacity in the Office of Human Resources Management (A/57/276) is also currently before the

General Assembly, and describes current as well as prospective monitoring activities of that office.

Action 34

25. Through the creation of a new ombudsman function and the appointment of the first Ombudsman by the Secretary-General in July 2002, an alternative method of dispute resolution has now been made available to staff and management. Other proposals relating to the administration of justice are outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/800), which is currently before the General Assembly. Under action 34 of the reform report, the Secretary-General intends to conduct an internal review to identify further areas for improvement and to ensure that the internal justice system is fair, efficient and responsive to the due process rights of staff members.